

**Health Insurance Reform, Child Nutrition**

**By Sam Farr**

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**What did you take away from the town hall meetings with your constituents this summer? What are you taking back to Washington in terms of their views on health care reform?**

What we don't lack in this debate is passion, on either side of the issue.

I've hosted seven town halls this summer and spoken to nearly 4,000 people. My office has received more than 7,000 calls, letters and e-mails. I rank this near the top of controversial issues during my 16 years in Congress, and with good reason. Comprehensive reform of our health care system pre-dates all of us. Our nation has seen several movements to overhaul health care in the last 100 years, but each time opponents have mustered support to put a stop to change.

What I've heard over and over again this summer-from both supporters and opponents alike-is that our system is broken. We may disagree on how to fix it, but we agree that it needs to be reformed. I agree with President Barack Obama when he said recently that we agree on a lot more than we disagree on.

There's wide consensus in Congress and throughout the nation that insurance companies shouldn't be allowed to deny coverage to individuals with pre-existing conditions or cancel insurance when we get sick. There's also agreement that our system simply costs too much and that we need to look at tools to lower cost. Everyone agrees that defensive medicine-when doctors order too many tests to defend against malpractice charges-is out of hand.

President Obama rightfully said he will look at ways to reform our legal system to restrain

those costs. And there's broad accord that tens of thousands of American families shouldn't be forced into bankruptcy each year due to medical costs. So that leaves us with a handful of legitimate disagreements (which are currently being negotiated) and far too many myths and misconceptions.

The president did a good job addressing many of the mistaken beliefs about what this bill would do, and I've done the same in my town halls. I hope we've able to clear up as many problems as possible.

Let me leave you with one last set of numbers: as of last week, I have responded to exactly 7,300 calls, e-mails and letters about health care. Of that total, 6,734 residents of the Central Coast have supported reforming our system, while 566 have opposed reform. I think those numbers speak for themselves.

I see broad support across Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties for reform, and I'm looking forward to the next few weeks as Congress moves closer to final legislation.

**Compared to the previous administration, where does the Obama administration stand on child nutrition, and how are they poised to help enact change in that area?**

I think what we're seeing in Washington regarding child nutrition programs, and child well-being in general, is a complete rethink of how we promote healthy lifestyles.

It started back in February with the Children's Health Insurance Program. Just two weeks after his inauguration, President Obama signed legislation that expanded health coverage to 11 million children. After being twice vetoed by the previous administration, this showed that President Obama is taking child well-being seriously.

The current debate on health care reform also points us in the right direction. We're seeing a lot more attention being given to preventive health care. It may seem like a no-brainer, but taking active steps to keep Americans healthy isn't our health industry's top priority. Only when we devote more resources to preventing illness will we see the kinds of advances our country

deserves. I also believe the administration's focus on fruits and vegetables is terribly important. During hearings before the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, of which I am a member, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack repeatedly said we must shift more funds to providing fruits and vegetables to our children. Studies consistently show our children are eating only about half of the fruits and vegetables they should. We need to put our money where our children's mouths are and put more fruits and vegetables into our school cafeterias. I look forward to moving that debate forward when I introduce the Children's Fruit and Vegetable Act this month. With role models like the president and first lady in the White House and a Cabinet that truly believes healthy children should be a top priority, I think we'll see some very important advances out of Washington this year.